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NO ZIM-PATHY OFF VAUGHAN

■ from RODNEY WHITE in Bulawayo

MICHAEL VAUGHAN turned his back on England's unpopular tour of Zimbabwe yesterday with a record stand, a 4-0 series whitewash and the man-of-the-series award.

It has been a difficult trip for the England skipper as he tried to balance cricket and politics, with the one-day matches being boycotted by the majority of white Zimbabweans as a protest against hated ruler Robert Mugabe. But nothing has affected Vaughan's form as he showed again yesterday with a career-best limited-overs display to help England finish with a 74-run victory.

Vaughan smashed an unbeaten 90, beating his previous highest against Australia in last September's ICC Championships Trophy semi-final win by four, and complete his fourth half-century in his last six one-day internationals.

And his experience was badly needed after England had slipped to 104 for five.

Best

Wicket-keeper Gairt Jones was also in dazzling form as the pair put on an England one-day sixth-wicket record of 150 runs off 141 balls to set a target of 261-6.

England's previous best was the 120 Jones had put on with Kevin Pietersen in the second match of the series in Harare only last Wednesday. Zimbabwe never came close to an upset as they were blown out for 187 in 48.4 overs as England followed up Saturday's eight-wicket win.

It was also a great day for Darren Gough, who had been dropped on Saturday to give Simon Jones a warm-up for the five-Test series in South Africa starting on December 17.

He roared back to take three early wickets and finished with 4-34 as only a 75-run stand between Hamilton Masakadza and captain Tatenda Taibu prevented a complete rout before Zimbabwe lost their last

SCOREBOARD

ENGLAND	
Bell c Matsikenyeri b Rainsford	30
Prior c Vermeulen b Rainsford	35
Vaughan not out	90
Strauss c Chigumbura b Matsikenyeri	17
Pietersen c Nkala b Matsikenyeri	9
Collingwood run out	5
Jones c Ebrahim b Chigumbura	80
Batty not out	0
Extras w3 nb1	4
Total 6 wickets (50 overs)	261
Fall: 1-52 2-71 3-83 4-94 5-104 6-254	
ZIMBABWE	
Matsikenyeri c G Jones b Gough	10
Taylor c G Jones b Gough	4
Ebrahim b Gough	0
Vermeulen c Collingwood b S Jones	5
Masakadza b Collingwood	66
Taibu c Prior b Collingwood	23
Chigumbura b Bell	29
Nkala c Pietersen b Gough	7
Panyangara c Batty b Bell	13
Uisoys not out	12
Rainsford b Bell	0
Extras lb2 w13 nb3	18
Total (48.4 overs)	187
Fall: 1-23 2-22 3-43 4-51 5-118 6-129 7-149 8-188 9-187	
Bowling: Wharf 6-3-14-0, Gough 8-0-34-4, Collingwood 10-0-34-2, S Jones 8-3-35-1, Batty 10-1-36-0, Pietersen 2-0-22-0, Bell 3-4-0-5-5, Strauss 1-0-3-0.	

four wickets for just 19 runs. Vaughan then voiced his concern over Zimbabwean cricket with 15 rebels refusing to play in a protest against alleged selection racism.

Ex-captain Heath Streak, who led the protest, was at the game and Vaughan said: "I find it disappointing when you see Heath in the stand just watching."

"I don't want to get involved in the political wrangles going on but Zimbabwe certainly aren't putting their best team out on the pitch at the minute. "They are not picking their strongest team. I find that sad."

TROPHY BITTER: Michael Vaughan was the prize guy yesterday as England wrapped up their controversial tour to Zimbabwe with a fourth straight win



Lewis to stay retired

■ by JOE DELANEY

LENNOX Lewis is refusing to make a comeback despite the latest challenge from Vitali Klitschko.

Lewis retired after a controversial cuts win over the Ukrainian last year.

Klitschko, who defends his WBC title against Danny Williams in Las Vegas on Saturday, is desperate for another meeting.

Lewis will be ringside for that fight but he insisted: "Whatever they offer me is not enough."

Sit

"At some point in your life you have to think about your health and your future. I've tried to make responsible decisions in my life and this is definitely one of my biggest."

"I'm not really missing it and I'm glad I've given the chance to other boxers to have an opportunity to fight for the heavyweight championship of the world."

He added: "I can just sit back and watch them and say to everyone, 'Been there, done that.'"

Slump for Lee

LEE WESTWOOD hit a disastrous 80 to end his hopes of a £650,000 pay-day at the Nedbank Challenge in South Africa.

Westwood suffered in the thick rough and tricky bunkers at Sun City as Retief Goosen took the title.

His round included a ruinous triple-bogey at the eighth hole and a double at the 18th.

Goosen won despite having flu symptoms earlier in the tournament.

He also had to resist the temptation on Friday to fly to London to join his wife Tracy and new-born daughter Ella, who had been admitted to hospital with bronchitis.

Goosen was persuaded to stay by his wife and a closing round of 69 rewarded the decision handsomely.

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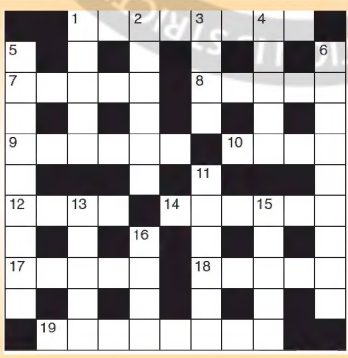
SPORTWORD

CLUES ACROSS

1. See 13 down.
7. Car in which Jim Clark became Formula One world champion (5)
8. Gradi, Creve Alexandra manager (5)
9. Frank boxing promoter (6)
10. Rampakess, Surrey and England batsman (4)
12. Pintor, boxer who became WBC bantamweight champion in 1979 (4)
14. John boxer who became WBC light-heavyweight champion in 1974 (6)
17. Djorkaef, former Bolton Wanderers and France forward (5)
18. Gudjohnsen, Chelsea and Iceland forward (5)
19. City, FA Cup winners in 1987 (8)

CLUES DOWN

1. Flying winner of the 1,000 Guineas in 1976 (5)
2. Hamed, former WBO featherweight champion (6)
3. Herbie former WBC heavyweight champion (4)
4. European Cup Winners Cup winners in 1993 (5)
5. Gareth most capped Wales rugby forward of all-time (9)
6. Matthew Hoggard's cricket county (9)
11. Nottingham football club (6)
13. and 14. Gorras, Manchester City and Costa Rica forward (5,8)
15. Sheringham, former England striker (5)
16. Martin leading National Hunt trainer (4)



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COLE AS YOU LIKE: Andy Cole celebrates his winner with Brian McBride

SERIOUSLY football Coleman delight

CROSS CHRIS DOES TRICK

WASHING your dirty linen in public is not always a good idea for a football manager.

But it has produced dazzling results for Chris Coleman.

The Fulham boss slammed the attitude of his players during the defeat to Blackburn in their previous league game.

And it produced a much-improved midweek Carling Cup show against Chelsea, and a slick, passionate performance that brought a vital win at Carrow Road.

Coleman expected no less.

Outburst

"I didn't apologise to the guys for last week's outburst," he said.

"I didn't say anything to the Press that I hadn't said in the dressing-room."

"In fact, a couple of the players came to have a chat with me in the week and apologised to me because they were embarrassed by their performances."

"They knew the Blackburn performance was unacceptable. This time we were

by GEORGE SCOTT
Fulham 0 Norwich 1

hungry, we had that desire back and we got the three points and that was vital for us. "Next it's Manchester United on Monday and we are capable of beating them."

"We're not always going to play well but when we don't we have to show a bit more togetherness on the pitch."

Fulham showed just enough togetherness for the early goal that won this match. A slick move of one-touch passing was capped by Andy Cole latching on to Brian McBride's back-heel and planting the ball into Robert Green's net.

It was a further 80 minutes before Green came face to face with Cole, when the Fulham striker blocked the goalkeeper from taking a quick goal-kick and then sarcastically applauded him for what he viewed as a deliberate attempt to get him in trouble. It worked - Cole was booked.

But Coleman insisted: "Sometimes Andy upsets people with what he says or does on the pitch but he's got that killer instinct and if you knock that out of him then it's not the same Andy Cole."

The only plus for Norwich was that the other three clubs in the bottom four also lost.

But keeper Green warned: "If you are looking at other clubs to do you favours then you know you're going to be struggling."

TEAMS

NORWICH: Green, Edworthy, Fleming, Doherty, Drury, Bentley, Helveg, Mulryne (Safri 62), Huckerby, McKenzie, Svensson (Jonson 68). Subs: McVeigh, Ward, Shackell.

FULHAM: Van der Sar, Volz, Pearce, Rehman, Bocanegra, Legwinski, Diop, Malbranque, Pembroke, McBride, Cole. Subs: Knight, Flitney, Radzinski, Hammond, Rosénior.

REF: A Wiley.

Lester: We'll do it

JACK LESTER threw boss Joe Kinnear a Nottingham Forest lifeline - and then trained his sights on survival.

Lester grabbed his first goal since returning to the City Ground from Sheffield United last month to earn relegation-threatened Forest victory and take the heat off Kinnear.

Critics

Fans called for Kinnear's head before Saturday's game but Lester's match-winner silenced even his fiercest critics.

And the goalscorer is convinced Forest can plot a course for survival.

"If I honestly thought Forest would go down I wouldn't have come back

Nottm F 2 QPR 1

to the club," he said. "There's more than enough quality in our squad to survive and the way we played against Rangers shows that we're good enough to stay up."

Lester headed home from an Alan Rogers cross in the 57th minute to clinch Forest's fourth league win of the campaign.

His goal came just nine minutes after Rangers had cancelled out Andy Reid's first-half opener with a Georges Santos strike. The Londoners have now lost their last five away games.

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I Claimed £3,677!

Steve

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Sue

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**SERIOUSLY
football**

Outcast back on track

CARR CLICKS INTO

ALL SMILES:
Robbie Keane
celebrates the goal
that sealed the
points for Spurs

GEAR

MICHAEL Carrick continued to repay Martin Jol's faith with another influential performance.

Carrick - out of favour under previous boss Jacques Santini - and goalscorer Robbie Keane were the outstanding players as Spurs won their second Premiership match in succession.

"I enjoyed it a lot and it was great to get a win," said Carrick. "The second half was hard and yet I really loved the scrap."

Patchy

"We have not been winning too much lately but we took control of the game, shut up shop and defended really well."

"Apart from one shot from Paul Dickov they didn't really have a chance."

Keane scored only his third league goal of a patchy season, but his inventive link-up play with Jermain Defoe caused problems all afternoon before the Irishman grabbed the winner 11 minutes after the break.

Another three points suggested new boss Jol may be turning the

by JAMES DOBSON

**Blackburn 0
Spurs 1**

side round and Carrick showed flashes of the midfield guile which has won him two full England caps.

"It is just matches that I need," said the former West Ham man.

"I have played five games on the trot now and I feel I am getting back into the swing of playing and performing every week."

"I'm delighted to be back in the Premier League again."

"I have got fit and stepped up my performances."

"The Championship, or whatever it is called now, is just not comparable and I am so happy to have got back to where I was."

Yet, a relegation battle looked on after Spurs' six-match run of defeats but two wins have made all the difference.

Carrick said: "Football is strange because you cannot

always be at your best. But the difference is that when Arsenal or Manchester United have a blip they are still second or third in the league, whereas with us we go to 15th."

"This last week has been big for us with two wins in the league and without those six points we could easily have been right down in the relegation dogfight."

"But now at least we are in mid-table and in a bit more comfort."

Rovers, after a five-match unbeaten run, were truly awful and boss Mark Hughes admitted it was a flat display from his side.

He said: "I just hope we can put this down as a non-performance and get on with the rest of the season."

TEAMS

BLACKBURN: Friedel, Naili, Todd, Short (Matteo 85), Johansson, Reid, Ferguson, Tugay (Thompson 65), Emerton, Dickov, Gallagher (Bohroyd 56). Subs: Fittroft, Enckelman.
TOTTENHAM: Robinson, Kelly, Naylor, King, Atouba, Pedro Mendes, Brown, Carrick, Ziegler (Redknapp 73), Defoe (Kanoute 88), Keane (Gardner 77). Subs: Pamarot, Fulep.
REF: M Dean.

Mick throws book at ref

REFEREES risk the wrath of managers every time they make a controversial decision but Graham Salisbury must be the first official to fall out over an autograph.

The Lancashire whistle-blower is off Mick McCarthy's Christmas card list for walking into the West Ham dressing-room before kick-off and asking Teddy Sheringham to sign his autobiography.

Two hours later, the Hammers had inflicted a first home defeat on Sunderland after Salisbury had sent off Black Cats' defender Steve

**by IAN MURTAGH
Sunderland 0 West Ham 2**

Caldwell for allegedly stamping on Luke Chadwick.

McCarthy said: "I'm not saying it had any bearing on the red-card decision but I find it beneath contempt."

"I'm looking for fairness and a level playing field and I don't like to see things like that."

"I certainly wouldn't have a referee coming into our dressing room asking for a book to be signed."

Mind you, none have ever asked me for my autograph."

Video evidence proved that Caldwell's boot did come down on the grounded Chadwick's chest as he clutched the ball to prevent Sunderland taking a quick free-kick. And Salisbury had no option but to send off Caldwell.

Sunderland could have gone top with victory at the Stadium of Light. But Marlon Harewood broke the deadlock with his 10th goal of the season and Sheringham came on to tap home in injury time.

**SERIOUSLY
football**

Pompey's twin blast for Baggies boss



STICK IT, ROBBO

LOM BLAST:
Lomano
LuoLuo fires
home the
last-minute
Pompey winner

BRYAN ROBSON'S claim Portsmouth would struggle to attract a top British boss to work under a director of football was thrust firmly back down his throat – on and off the field.

Robson was nearly choking with disbelief after Albion threw away a 2-1 lead in the final five minutes to stay firmly rooted in the Premiership drop zone. Sub Eyal Berkovic master-

by **PETER WHITE**
Portsmouth 3 West Brom 2

mindful Portsmouth's dramatic comeback that must have even had laid-back executive director Velimir Zajec jumping for joy. After all, it was Zajec's idea to introduce the Israeli playmaker for the final 10 minutes.

Then Robson was put firmly in his place again, this time by Milan Mandaric.

The Portsmouth chairman made it eminently clear the Albion manager should concen-

trate on his own duties at the Hawthorns.

Robson reckoned the list of would-be bosses willing to serve under Zajec would be limited.

Amazed

But Mandaric countered: "I was amazed to see his comments, because anyone who knows our club will realise we don't even have a director of football."

"When we appoint a new manager or head coach he has to report to someone but Velimir

will certainly not be picking the team. In Velimir we have someone with vast football knowledge who can provide assistance.

"I am disappointed to hear that a Premiership manager seems to be fighting that idea."

Own-goals by Dejan Stefanovic and Darren Purse levelled things before Matt Taylor's attempts to keep the ball in play allowed Ricardo Scimeca to cross for Robert Earnshaw to tap in his fifth in as many games. It looked all over until

Berkovic's arrival 10 minutes from time. He crossed for Arjan de Zeeuw to head in the equaliser from a free-kick, before supplying Lomano LuoLuo to blast in the 89th-minute winner.

TEAMS

PORTSMOUTH: Ashdown, Griffin, De Zeeuw, Stefanovic, Unsworth (Primus 26), Stone, Faye, Quashie (Berkovic 80), Berger, Taylor (LuoLuo 55), Fuller. Subs: Hielop, Cisse. **WEST BROM:** Houl, Scimeca, Moore, Purse, Clement, Haas (Gaardsoe 66), Johnson, Greening, Gera (Sekiri 70), Kanu, Earnshaw (Hulse 77). Subs: Kuszczyk, Koumas. REF: P. Walton.

Give it to Stu say players

■ **Wolves 4 Reading 1**

WOLVES caretaker-boss Stuart Gray is the man the players want to take over from sacked Dave Jones.

After Wolves sent high-flying Reading crashing to only their third defeat in 13 games, winger Mark Kennedy said: "If you ask the lads if they want Stuart to stay in charge they will all put their hands up."

"He knows the game and he's doing a great job but it's in the hands of the board and they have a massive decision to make."

Charge

Gray engineered Reading's downfall to make it three wins, one draw and two defeats from his six games.

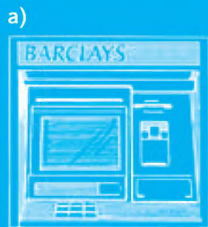
But it was far from a convincing performance. Wolves looked good only after the introduction of teenage striker Leon Clarke, who grabbed two late goals.

Colin Cameron gave them a 31st-minute lead and Nigerian international Seyi Olofinjana made it 2-0 in the 45th minute.

But Reading pulled a goal back two minutes after the break through Dean Morgan.

Wolves then struggled to hang on to their advantage before Clarke, 19, scored with two superb efforts in the final 13 minutes.

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Be fluent in football.



SERIOUSLY
football

FA CUP SPECIAL: Exeter sub's goalden wonder

BLACKPOOL1
PORT VALE0

BOSS Colin Hendry was grateful to have at last enjoyed the rub of the green as Blackpool edged into the third round.

Scott Taylor's speculative 20-yard strike took a deflection off a Vale defender to leave goalkeeper Jonny Brain stranded. The goal put the Seaside into the third round for the fourth successive year, but they rode their luck.

Vale striker Billy Paynter had the chance to put his side ahead from the penalty spot in the first-half, but Lee Jones pushed his spot-kick against the post.

Hendry said: "We needed a big slice of luck and we got it. After all the bad luck we have suffered this season that's how it goes, but I'm sure Martin Foyle won't agree with those sentiments."

Vale boss Foyle was happy with his side's performance and claimed his side deserved more.

"I felt we were by far the better side particularly in the first-half when we tried to keep the ball on the deck whereas Blackpool just huffed and puffed."

"What I can say is that my team gave 100 per cent."

PETERBORO2
BATH0

POSH boss Barry Fry was happy his side made it into the hat for the third round but he was far from satisfied with his side's performance.

A Calum Willock brace before the interval put Posh in control, but Bath created a series of opportunities, with former Rushden striker Scott Partridge coming close on several occasions.

But Willock also wasted several chances and should have completed a memorable hat-trick just after the break, following a poor header from Power, but he blazed over.

Fry said: "Calum Willock looked wonderful in pre-season but he has struggled with injuries and hopefully those two goals will give him a bit of confidence."

"We have a few strikers in form at the club now and that gives me a nice selection headache for Tuesday evening's game at Milton Keynes."

He added: "The main objective was to get through to round three, but we didn't play well at all."

"However, it was all about making sure we got the right result and it was vitally important to get through."

HULL4
MACCLESFIELD0

STRIKER Delroy Facey took the plaudits from manager Peter Taylor for his two-goal heroics which helped send Hull into the third round for the first time since the 1999/2000 season.

Ryan France and Stuart Elliott were also on target for the Tigers. Taylor said: "I thought we scored four very good goals and they all arrived at important times."

"I think Delroy Facey is looking fit and very quick and is showing a lot of confidence so it's a magnificent plus for us."

Counterpart Brian Horton, a former Hull manager, admitted changing the formation had done something to do with the result.

He said: "I'll take the blame a little bit because I changed the system. We tried to play 4-3-3, and I should have stuck with our usual system."

HISTON1
YEovil3

GARY JOHNSON felt Yeovil were worthy winners after reaching the third round for the second successive year.

Phil Jevons and Lee Johnson put the Glovers in control, only for Neil Kennedy to pull one back before Yemi Odubade made the tie safe in stoppage time.

Johnson said: "They were always going to pressure us in the first-half."

"We spent all week planning on playing with aggression that didn't turn into anger. We were able to play against the aerial bombardment that we had expected."

Histon boss Steve Fallon added: "We gave them a good shout in the first-half, which was fairly even, but overall they were the better team."

HALIFAX1
CHESTER3

INEXPERIENCED Chester was praised by boss Ian Rush after they claimed a convincing win.

Rush said: "We had three YTS players out against Halifax and I wasn't afraid to put them out there."

The former Liverpool striker also owed a big debt to ex-Everton man Michael Branch.

Branch has been out for a month with a serious ankle injury and was not expected to feature but Rush was forced to play him and the gamble paid off in spectacular style with goals for Branch either side of the break.

He glanced the visitors in front on 41 minutes from a Sean Hesseycross and within minutes of the restart Branch sealed victory with a penalty.

He was upended in the box by former City defender Matt Doughty as the pair chased Andy Harris's through ball on 48 minutes - with Branch sending Ian Dunbavin the wrong way from the resulting spot kick.

Halifax substitute Neil Ross started a potential fightback for the home side with a close-range finish just minutes after Craig Midgley hit the post but the threat was snuffed out by Chester substitute Kevin Rapley who tapped in the winner on 74 minutes.

HEREFORD1
BOSTON3

BOSTON manager Steve Evans was a relieved man after his came from behind to edge a five-goal thriller.

Tamika Mkandawire gave Hereford the lead only for Boston to hit back through Jason Lee and an Andy Kirk brace before Lee Mills pulled one back for the Bulls at the death.

Evans said: "We were sloppy for the first 10 minutes and they were running the tempo of the game."

"However, in the second-half we dominated and if they got back into it at the end and had got a result it would have been a travesty."

Opposite number Graham Turner admitted experimenting with a long-ball game failed to pay dividends.

He said: "Having got off to a great start I just felt our front players might get a bit of change when we knocked the ball up long to them. That's not our usual style of play, but we tried to match Boston at their own game."

"It worked for them and worked well, but I just felt that our players were not mentally strong enough at times to cope."

NORTHAMPTON1
BURY0

SCOTT MCGLEISH hit the decisive goal for Northampton, leaving Bury manager Graham Barrow rueing his luck.

The former Colchester striker had already seen a penalty saved by Shakers' keeper Andy Marriott before grabbing what proved to be the winner in the 22nd minute, nodding the ball in from close range after Martin Smith's shot came back off the bar.

"We knew it was going to be tough, but we should have won," said Barrow. "To play like that and not even get a replay was very disappointing."

Cobblers boss Colin Calderwood was well satisfied with his side's commitment: "We had to work really hard to preserve our lead, but the players showed a lot of commitment especially in the tackle."



SEALED WITH A KISS: Exeter goal heroes Steve Flack (left) and Dean Moxey at the end

MOXEY HAS
EX FACTOR

FLACK: Opener

SUPERSUB Dean Moxey fired cash-strapped Exeter into the FA Cup third round with a sensational strike from 45 yards and insisted: I meant that!

The Exeter-born 18-year-old, who caught Donny keeper Andy Warrington napping, said: "I saw him off his line and went for it and it dropped in."

"There was only Sean Devine in the box so I thought why not."

"The keeper was scrambling backwards and he was flailing with his hands and when it went in, I just went mental."

"I ran the length of the pitch to celebrate. It's amazing. The manager told me before the game I wasn't playing and said to be ready - and I was ready. I came on

EXETER2
DONCASTER1

and won the man of the match...unbelievable. I've watched the FA Cup every year and it's amazing to play in it. I've only scored three professional goals, but this was the best."

Donny boss Dave Penney was left to rue his side's missed chances.

Wonder

"We did enough to have won the game," he groaned. "They started well, but we certainly had enough chances to have got something from the game."

"If we had scored our goal a bit earlier, it could have made a difference."

Veteran striker Steve Flack had put the Grecians in front when he beat Warrington to the ball to head home Alex Jeannin's free kick.

Moxey's wonder doubled the Conference side's lead four minutes into the second half and a late Greg Blundell strike four minutes from time was just a consolation for Doncaster.

Exeter boss Alex Inglethorpe, whose side knocked out League Two team Grimsby in the first round, said: "We set our stall out early in the game and played extremely well against a very, very good team."

"On balance it was an even contest on chances, but the difference was that we took ours. Deano's goal was fantastic."

It's the wild West

CHRIS WESTWOOD is the defender who can't stop scoring.

After netting just four times in 265 outings for Hartlepool, he's landed three in a week!

His brace put Pool into the third round at home to Boston and the ex-Wolves trainee admitted: "I don't know what's going on. I didn't score at all last season and I can't believe this."

Profile

"I told people I'd score twice this season to make up for not scoring last and now I've doubled that tally. I'm getting prolific now!"

Westwood netted a header to put Pool in

HARTLEPOOL5 ALDERSHOT1

front on 13 minutes then made it two from a tidy side-footer after great work from Australian international Joel Porter.

The Shots, after being outplayed for 30 minutes, found a lifeline through a Tim Sills strike on 36 minutes and then hit the bar during their purple patch with a 25-yard Jon Challoner strike.

But they ran out of steam in the closing stages and Pool eased home with further strikes from two-goal Adam Boyd and Mark Tinkler.

Man-of-the-match Westwood added: "We had to show Aldershot respect but we were quite comfortable in the end."

while Brentford ace gets second chance after his penalty howler

SALAKO IN REAL SPOT OF BOTHER

by IAN EDWARDS

HINCKLEY 0
BRENTFORD 0

JOHN SALAKO last night breathed a massive sigh of relief over the penalty miss that could have landed him in hot water with boss Martin Allen.

The 36-year-old Brentford veteran feared his love affair with the FA Cup may have been at an end when he fluffed his big chance to ease Brentford into the third round against non-League Hinckley United.

Salako, a runner-up with Crystal Palace in the 1990 final, now has a chance to put things right in the replay with the Conference side.

And the winger admitted: "I'm not going to say it was a great penalty. The only good thing is that it didn't cost us too dearly.

"It's the first one I can remember missing in my career and to do it live on TV is not great.

Taste

"My head was all over the place for a while afterwards and I thought we may get knocked out, but at least we've got another chance now."

The penalty came when Hinckley captain Stuart Storer handled the ball as he jumped to stem an attack. Salako hit his shot to Hinckley goalkeeper Tommy Whittle's left — but smacked it against the advertising hoardings.

League One leaders Luton await the winners of the replay and their boss, Mike Newell, was in Hinckley's ramshackle ground ahead of his meeting with Brentford tomorrow.

But he could just as easily have got an early taste of non-League third-round opponents, who are managed by ex-Notts County midfielder Dean Thomas.

Hinckley more than matched Brentford and only an excellent reflex stop by Stuart Nelson 18 minutes from time prevented Paul Barnes from snatching a famous win.

And Thomas was delighted with his part-timers and for the act of God which kept them in the Cup.

He said: "I've always believed that God moves in mysterious ways and it happened again for us."

"He's looked after us all throughout the competition and I'm glad they missed the penalty because it was a bad decision and it should never have been given."

Whatever the outcome of the replay Hinckley have landed an early Christmas present with a £100,000 pay day ahead of their Boxing Day move into their new Marston's Stadium.



OOPS: Salako beats Tommy Whittle but puts his penalty wide

Preece wades in

BOURNEMOUTH midfielder Wade Elliott apologised to Andy Preece after the pair renewed a two-year feud.

Former Bury boss Preece clashed with Elliott after the Shakers' Third Division play-off semi-final defeat at Dean Court two seasons ago.

The duo exchanged handbags again after Elliott had helped Bournemouth dump out Conference side Carlisle, where Preece now plays.

Preece, accused Elliott of goading him about the defeat as he went to shake hands at the final whistle.

"Wade was just doing what he normally does at the end of matches," he said.

"I only wanted to shake his hand but

BOURNEMOUTH.....2 CARLISLE.....1

he was saying things and tried to get clever with me.

"From the television it may look like he is going to shake my hand but the stuff he is saying when he is doing it did not reflect that. He was taking the micky."

Elliott said: "I was very chirpy because we were in the hat for the third-round draw.

"There is a lot of pressure on us to get through the early rounds because we know how important the revenue is for the club. I didn't say much to Andy but I never meant to offend anybody and if I did I am sorry."

OLDHAM.....4
LEYTON ORIENT.....0

BRIAN TALBOT urged Chris Killen to prove his first hat-trick for the club was not a one-off after guiding Oldham into round three.

The New Zealand international took his tally to eight goals in six games, with Lee Croft completing the rout.

Killen has been plagued by injury problems since his £250,000 switch from Manchester City almost three years ago, but boss Talbot insisted: "He is back with a bang and might even have scored more.

"Chris will grab the headlines and it is just reward for all his hard work. Now he has to do it on a regular basis.

"But this result wasn't all about one man, it was an excellent team performance and there were a lot of unsung heroes out there."

Os manager Martin Ling rounded on his players for their disappointing display against the League One outfit.

He said: "That was the worst we have played this season. We thought we could match them, but they gave us a lesson. We were poor and our passing never got going."

STEVENAGE.....0
ROCHDALE.....2

ROCHDALE boss Steve Parkin said he was keen to avoid a potential money-spinning trip to the likes of Arsenal, Manchester United or Chelsea after a comfortable 2-0 victory at Stevenage took them into the third round.

"First and foremost I want to progress in this competition," said Parkin, after seeing Grant Holt score twice to defeat the Conference side.

"I know the chairman would like a Premiership team in the next round, but I'd rather not.

"The confidence is high at present and all I want to do is go as far as possible in the cup. A home draw against a lower league side would be very helpful."

Stevenage boss Graham Westley refused to be downhearted despite seeing his side crash out.

"For an hour it was a fairly even contest," said Westley.

"You could say that they had the better possession, but both sides struggled to create any real chances."

"Dannie Bulman's shot just before the hour into the side-netting was crucial. If that had gone in it could have been a very different story."

"The team did themselves credit, but were beaten by a better side."

SLOUGH.....1
YEADING.....3

STAR striker DJ Campbell can go all the way in the professional game, according to Yeading manager Johnson Hippolyte.

Campbell's double coupled with a Davis Haule strike sent Yeading into round three after Glen Harris had put Slough ahead early on from the penalty spot.

Hippolyte said: "He's got touch and pace. He's got more tricks than I've ever seen. I've played against people like Les Ferdinand and he's up there with all of them."

Slough manager Eddie Denton admitted his side failed to find the answers to Yeading's second-half onslaught.

He said: "There's nothing I can say at the moment that will pick the lads up. I thought on the day Yeading were physically and mentally stronger than us."

SWINDON manager Andy King was furious with his players after they allowed League Two side Notts County to claim a replay following a dire 1-1 draw.

Despite taking an early lead through Sean O'Hanlon, Swindon failed to capitalise and allowed County to snatch a dramatic injury-time equaliser through Stefan Oakes.

King raged: "That was the worst game I have seen here for a long time. The first-half was atrocious and the second probably was worse."

County boss Ian Richardson was delighted with his team's performance, saying: "Full credit to the lads - we fully deserved our goal at the end."

RUSHDEN & D.....2
COLCHESTER.....5

PHIL PARKINSON believes Greg Halford "has the ability to be the best striker in our division" after his hat-trick sent Colchester into the third round of the FA Cup.

Us boss Parkinson said: "I was delighted for the lad. That's six goals in the eight or nine games he's played up front."

"He's only 19 and started at left-back. He's 6ft 4in, pacy, good in the air and has good technique. Since he's played up front we haven't lost a game."

Craig Fagan also chipped in with a double, while Drewe Broughton and Stuart Gray made the score more respectable for Diamonds late on.

"As well as the goals, they both caused problems all afternoon and I thought Fagan was sensational."

Rushden manager Ernie Tippett refused to divulge why his team had performed so badly against their League One opponents.

He said: "We didn't play very well, but the reasons why that was will stay in the dressing room. We started off poorly and didn't defend very well."

"They played well and we've been dominated. I have to say their front two hurt us at times, but the first three goals were down to poor defending."

STOCKPORT.....0
SWANSEA.....0

SWANSEA boss Kenny Jackett felt his side were a little unlucky not to have secured a safe passage through to the third round after an entertaining stalemate against managerless Stockport.

Jackett said: "That's not a bad result for us, I'm quite pleased to be taking Stockport back to the Vetch Field for a replay."

"It was a typical cup tie. It had everything, chances, penalty appeals and near misses, but I was a little disappointed that we didn't hit the target enough."

Swansea's eight-goal maverick striker Lee Trundle came closest to scoring, but saw his 20-yard shot smack the crossbar after he had weaved his way past a clutch of bemused Stockport defenders.

Jackett added: "The game was there to be won for us, I felt we were in control for long periods out there. But at least we're in the hat for the third round draw."

Stockport caretaker boss Mark Lillis was also pleased with the result, saying: "All the lads played for the shirt and we've been trying to get that for a while now. It was a good performance all round."

SWINDON.....1
NOTTS COUNTY.....1

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WYCOMBE.....0
LUTON.....3

LUTON manager Mike Newell hailed the performance of striker Steve Howard after his fine brace ensured a safe passage into the third round.

The Hatters chief said: "Steve Howard's first goal was as good as any you will see this weekend."

Kevin Nicholls also struck to secure a comfortable win which left Wycombe manager John Gorman to concentrate on trying to lift his side towards the League Two play-off zone.

After his first game in charge of Wycombe, Gorman said he was unhappy with Howard's opener, but admitted Luton were the better side.

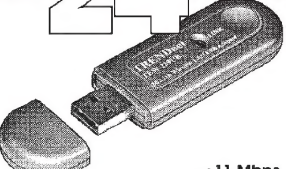
"I thought it was miles offside, but I'm not going to say too much because Luton were great," said Gorman.

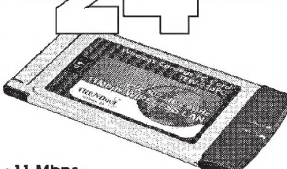
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SERIOUSLY football

Everton count the cost

WINDOW CLOSING ON MOYES

DAVID MOYES may find himself a victim of his own success when the transfer window opens next month.

After all, with his side nicely tucked in at No 3 in the Christmas Premiership chart, his cash-strapped board will no doubt be asking: If it's not broken, why mend it?

The Everton boss saw his side notch up their 10th win of the season with a tremendous fightback against Bolton — and that's one more than they achieved in the WHOLE of last season.

But Moyes is bracing himself for the worst in terms of attempting to bring in new blood.

He said: "We'd like more players and we'll attempt to do that if possible."

"But if not, then the players we have will turn up and most weeks they will have a chance of being in the 16 selected."

"Most players want that because they don't want to be hanging about on match days."

Bizarre

Everton, aided by some bizarre luck — the winner came via a wicked deflection off Bolton defender Raidi Jaidi — are now fighting for everything, including their places.

As Moyes explained: "Wins sustain them. They all keep going and that's perhaps because the players know that if they are out of the side they may not get back in."

"Everyone is on their toes because of that."

"There will be times when it will be hard to maintain the level we are at but the mental strength of the players is good. Physically, I am sure it will take its toll but we know that."

"But at this moment we

by **KEVIN FRANCIS**

Everton 3
Bolton 2

can't say that's looking like happening. We are getting the wins.

"Let's hope we can get a similar amount of wins in the second half of the season."

"We are in the cycle of doing well at the moment and the players have the feeling that they are doing everything they can to get results."

"In such a situation, I can't complain and neither can the supporters."

The only one complaining on Saturday was Bolton boss Sam Allardyce, who had rookie referee Howard Webb in his sights.

Allardyce was upset with the retaken free-kick from which Thomas Gravesen scored directly to level the score at 2-2 after Jay-Jay Okocha had initially been booked for encroaching.

Smouldering Sam said:



ON THE LEVEL: Gravesen and Carsley jump for joy as the Dane equalises

"The disappointment was the referee in major incidents. He is in his first season on the Premiership and looked as though he couldn't cope with the pressure and the mental side of the game."

"He had a major influence in us losing the game. I've a big problem with refs at the moment."

Big Sam had precious little to smile about apart from the two-goal performance of striker Kevin Davies, saying: "He was a major player for us."

Duncan Ferguson, in his

first start, opened Everton's account. His form may bring new efforts to keep him once his contract ends this season.

TEAMS

EVERTON: Martyn, Hibbert, Stubbs, Weir, Platon, Carsley, Gravesen, Cahill (Osman 69), Kilbane (McFadden 69), Ferguson (Yobo 86), Bent. Subs: Wright, Watson. BOLTON: Essiackelainen, Hunt, N'Gotty, Jaidi, Hierro, Campo, Giannakopoulos (Nolan 86), Okocha (Ferdinand 86), Speed, Pedersen, Davies. Subs: Poole, Barnes, Cesar. REF: H Webb.

We've Cott to keep Blake

STEVE COTTERILL has pleaded with the cash-strapped Burnley board not to sell Robbie Blake if they want to make the play-offs.

Wigan made an improved £600,000 bid for the 11-goal striker last week and Blake is expected to leave in the next few days.

Blake, 28, played probably his last game as the dismal Claret's lost to Paul Wotton's stoppage-time penalty at Home Park.

Cotterill has slapped a £2m price

■ **Plymouth 1 Burnley 0**

tag on Blake to scare off Wigan but must know he won't raise that kind of money in a depressed transfer market.

The Burnley manager had been making progress after a slow start and three wins in a row had pushed his side into the top 10.

But all three winning goals in those games had come from Blake. Even Wigan's bid would be a loss

on Blake, who cost previous boss Stan Ternent £1m three years ago.

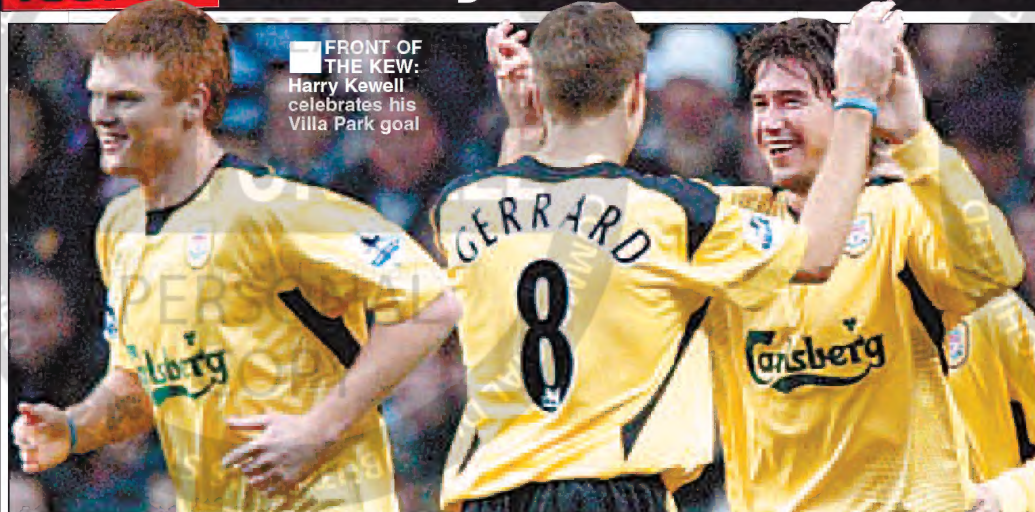
Cotterill said: "We never said we would get to the play-offs but we have been on a good run of form."

"We don't quite know where it will take us but with a bit of luck we will stay clear of injuries — which we have had an absolute catalogue of."

"I'd, of course, say that we also have to keep hold of our best players. There's no doubt about that."

SERIOUSLY football

Reds rally round off-form Aussie



FRONT OF THE KEW:
Harry Kewell celebrates his Villa Park goal

WE'LL HELP KEW OUT

LIVERPOOL stars have pledged to get behind Harry Kewell in a desperate bid to rescue his Anfield career.

The 26-year-old has gone from being the Wizard of Oz to football's version of the timid lion, playing without any heart.

Praying

But Kewell's first goal since February 29 provided him with the added bonus of hearing the travelling supporters chanting his name. Now his team-mates are praying he can turn the whole sorry business around.

Impressive Liverpool should have won this by a mile and when Kewell scored with a close-range header on 17 minutes, Rafael Benitez's men looked to be on their way to a victory stroll. But

by DAVE ARMITAGE
Aston Villa 1 Liverpool 1

Villa somehow managed to drag themselves back in it just before half-time with a dubious free-kick superbly executed by Nobby Solano.

Liverpool defender Jamie Carragher said: "Harry has taken a fair bit of criticism and for the fans to get behind him like that must have given him a buzz."

"If someone had offered us four points from six against Arsenal and Villa away, plus the cup win over Spurs, we would have taken it but now we're disappointed we didn't get all six."

Fellow centre-half Sami Hyypia believes it is the whole team's responsibility to nurse Kewell's sagging confidence, adding: "That comes from within but we've got to help. He's taken a lot of stick but that goal should give him a lot of confidence and he'll prove what a good player he is."

Liverpool's frustration centred around the 44th-minute incident which saw Gavin McCann go tumbling just outside the box under the close attention of

Carragher. The Reds insist the Villa man took a fall.

Angry Hyypia snapped: "McCann's reaction said it all. He was lucky not to get a red card for that."

"He stood up straight away, put his hands out and sort of said 'Sorry ref but that was my fault'. That proved to be the turning point."

Robbery

Referee Mark Halsey was not convinced and what happened next was tantamount to robbery as Solano swept a curling free kick into the roof of the net for his fourth goal of the season.

Even Villa boss David O'Leary was forced to admit: "We could have been dead and buried after 45 minutes."

TEAMS

ASTON VILLA: Sorenson, De la Cruz, Mollberg, Delaney, Samuel, Solano, McCann (Berson 69), Davis, Barry, Angel, Cole (Luke Moore 35). Sub: Postma, Whittingham, Ridgwell. LIVERPOOL: Kirkland, Finnan, Carragher, Hyypia, Risse, Nunez (Josemi 45), Gerrard (Sinama Pongolle 92), Hamann, Alonso, Kewell, Mellor (Traore 62). Sub: Dudek, Dias. REF: M Halsey.



SOL LUCKY:
Solano's joy at his leveller

Magilton: Ashton is first class

■ Crewe 2 Ipswich 2

JIM MAGILTON has tipped Dean Ashton to take the Premiership by storm - with Tottenham heading the list of Premiership sides tracking the England Under-21 striker.

Veteran Ipswich midfielder Magilton watched Ashton take his tally to 17 for the season with two explosive pieces of finishing to put Joe Royle's promotion-chasers 2-0 down within the first half-hour.

Only a rousing second-half fightback by the high-flying visitors saved them from defeat after Ashton made it six goals in four outings to further enhance his reputation as one of the deadliest finishers outside the top flight.

It is understood Spurs will make a £2.5m move for Ashton during the transfer window.

And Magilton, who has played alongside the likes of Matt Le Tissier at Southampton and Paolo Di Canio at Sheffield Wednesday, said: "He's a good finisher and I could see him playing in the Premiership."

Quality

"I think our manager has tried to sign him on a few occasions. He's got quality but I think he's going to have to move sooner rather than later."

"It's a big decision for him. If Crewe get the right money I'm sure he'll go. It will be interesting to see which club takes him."

Magilton is convinced Ipswich will be joining Ashton in the top flight after rescuing an unlikely point following a rousing second-half display.

Ashton struck twice in the space of three minutes before strikes by Richard Naylor and Darren Bent made it one defeat in 13 for Ipswich.

Royle was frustrated his side failed to win after dominating the second half.

"If you're two goals down and you come back it's a great revival," he said. "But if you miss enough chances to win three games then it's two points lost."

PESCH SUPER BLAST

■ Derby 2 Coventry 2

PAUL PESCHISOLDO leapt from the bench to inspire Derby to a thrilling fightback with a late leveller - and then banned people from calling him 'Supersub'.

The Canadian striker joined the action on 58 minutes and scored as George Burley's men stunned Coventry with two goals in the last four minutes.

Peter Reid's side were cruising thanks to goals from Stephen Hughes and Dele Adebola.

But Grzegorz Rasiak pulled one back on 87 minutes before Peschisoldo's equaliser.

Peschisoldo said: "Don't call me supersub. I thought I had left all that behind me. 'I want to start and play all the time.'"

Sky Blues boss Reid said: "My players are driving me mad. I have no explanation, my chin is on the floor."

5 FOR FUN

- Which Scottish snooker player won this year's UK Championship in York?
- Who, in 1979, after Viv Anderson in 1978, was the second black footballer to be capped by England?
- Which footballer did Sir Alf Ramsey describe as "10 years ahead of his time"?
- Which American baseball team have Diamondbacks as a nickname?
- 'Taps' is betting slang from the tic-tac sign for what odds?

ANSWERS: Page 54

Carlisle: End this Ell

LEEDS defender Clarke Carlisle insists the time has come to halt the crisis club's downward spiral.

The former Premiership giants are edging ever closer to the Championship relegation zone and Carlisle has made it clear that the slide has to stop.

Leicester fully deserved their win - and have now lost just one game in six following the arrival of new boss Craig Levein.

But for luckless Leeds, the misery just goes on and on.

And Carlisle admitted: "The boss gave us a right ear-bashing after the

by MARTIN HOWEY
Leeds 0 Leicester 2

game and he was right to. The time has come to look at the league table and say that it doesn't lie. We are too near to the bottom.

Misery

"We have to start doing something about it now before it's too late."

The defeat capped a dismal week for Kevin Blackwell, who had seen his struggling side lose to rock-bottom Rotherham a few days earlier.

Despite their well-documented

problems off the pitch, Leeds fans would not have anticipated such a miserable first half of the season.

Blackwell said: "Right now the whole club seems to be at a point where, if it can go wrong, it will."

Leicester, meanwhile, are on the up. Frenchman Lilian Nalis rattled home their first goal after the break before Gary Kelly sent a diving header into his own net.

But Nalis insisted: "We are not mentioning the word promotion. All we are doing at the moment is building under the new manager and then we will see how far it takes us."

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Ellington is ton-derful

NATHAN ELLINGTON bagged his 100th career goal to help take rampant Wigan back to the top of the Championship.

"The Duke" Ellington and strike partner Jason Roberts ended their six-week goal droughts to help fire the home side to their first victory in five games.

And Roberts said: "It's hard as a striker when you aren't scoring, so it's nice that myself and Nathan have got back on the score-sheet."

Top

Ipswich's failure to beat Crewe on Saturday had given Wigan the chance to reclaim top spot if they bagged all three points and they always looked like sending Billy Davies' dismal side back up the M6 empty-handed.

Lee McCulloch gave Latics the lead on

by MARK OGDEN
Wigan 5 Preston 0

26 minutes but Preston skipper Chris Lucketti had an equaliser ruled out by referee Martin Atkinson for an apparent push on the Scotland ace.

TV replays suggested Lucketti fairly won the ball and Davies fumed: "It was a big turning point because once they scored their second, it was game over for us."

Ex-Blackburn midfielder Alan Mahon made it 2-0 after the break.

Ellington notched his 12th goal in 21 games this term and then struck again 18 minutes from time to reach his century milestone, before Roberts netted the fifth from the penalty spot after being fouled by Marlon Broomes.



ON SONG: 'Duke' and McCulloch

SERIOUSLY football

Romm drive steals it

DAHLING DENIES ANSWERS

DENNIS ROMMEDAHL fired an injury-time winner to hand Charlton a priceless win over their South London rivals at Selhurst Park.

Rommedahl has failed to make a significant impact since joining the club from PSV Eindhoven during the summer.

But the Danish international became a hero with the Charlton faithful three minutes into injury time when he burst into the box and drilled the ball past Gabor Kiraly for his first goal in English football.

But before then, Palace hit-man Andy Johnson blew a golden chance to fire his side into the lead.

Delighted

The prolific forward saw a 57th-minute penalty superbly saved by Dean Kiely after he had been brought down by Charlton defender Talal El Karkouri.

And how he was made to pay deep in injury time, as Rommedahl skipped past the challenge of Danny Granville and crashed the ball into the back of the net.

Charlton boss Alan Curbishley is now hoping Rommedahl will start to repay the £2m he forked out for his services.

Curbishley said: "Dennis arrived late at the club and has been hurt by being left out of the side. But he showed what he can do in the last minute.

"It has not been all his own fault because he has been caught up in the inconsistency of the side.

I just hope he has shown a few people what he is capable of and hopefully we can see more of that."

Aki Riihilahti saw a close-range header cannon back off the bar in the 43rd minute.

However, Palace chairman Simon Jordan hit home much harder than his team with a stunning attack on rival owners and superstar footballers.

He blasted: "I don't give



DROMM DO: Dennis Rommedahl hits Charlton's winner

by MARC ISAACS
C Palace 0 Charlton 1

a £*** about football protocol and the other club owners.

"They want me to sit and have lunch before the games. £*** that."

"I don't go to football to drink chardonnay in the board rooms with those £***s. I go to win games. I don't have anything in common with 90 per cent

of football chairmen. They don't interest me. I'm no respecter of tradition and I've no time for the Manchester Uniteds and Arsenals.

"There's nothing to admire in these clubs. Football is a bull**** world. Agents are just nasty scum."

"I can't help being honest. I hate this hero status footballers have. It's the fans I love."

TEAMS

PALACE: Kiraly, Boyce, Hall, Popovic, Granville, Routledge, Riihilahti (Freedman 88), Watson, Kollika (Lakis 76), Hughes, Johnson, Subs: Speroni, Lagerwood, Andrews, Charlton, Kiely, Young, El Karkouri, Fortuna, Hreidarsson, Kishishev, Holland, Murphy, Thomas, Bartlett (Jeffers 76), Johnson (Rommedahl 19), Subs: Ewell, Andersen, Konchsky. REF: M Messias.

Information Station

Barclays Premiership

C Palace (0) 0 Charlton (0) 1
Runmedahl 90
At: 20.705

SATURDAY

Arsenal (1) 3 Birmingham (0) 0
Pires 33, Henry 80 86
At: 38.064

Aston Villa (1) 1 Liverpool (1) 1
Solano 44
At: 42.593

Blackburn (0) 0 Tottenham (0) 1
Kearse 56
At: 22.182

Chelsea (0) 4 Newcastle (0) 0
Lampard 63, Drogba 69
At: 42.328

Everton (1) 3 Bolton (1) 2
Forssberg 45
At: 35.929

Man Utd (0) 3 Southampton (0) 0
Scholtes 33, Rooney 58
At: 67.921

Norwich (0) 0 Fulham (1) 1
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Stockport (0) 0 Swanssea (0) 0
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Nationwide Conference

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Scarbrough (0) 1 Gravesend (0) 0
Haskwood 72
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Tamworth (0) 0 Dag & Red (0) 4
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Brown, G. Howell 8, Congompi 2, D. Meaux 2,
P. Howell, Bourgoin - T. Soucaze, Boninck, A.
Forest, C. Pecher, HT 36-1, At: 5,100.

Travis 29 Bourgoin 23
Travis - G. Gossan, Gossan, C. Gossan 2,
P. Gossan 5, Bath - T. Barnes, Wales, C.
Barkley 2, P. Barkley 3, HT 19-3, At: 4,000.

Leinster 3 3 0 0 147 57 13
Travis 3 3 0 0 172 68 9
Bath 3 3 0 0 261 71 9
Bourgoin 3 3 0 0 298 148 0

Glasgow 26 Lanell 3 29
Glasgow - T. Beveridge, MacLure, C.
Howarth 2, P. Howarth 4, Lanell 3, Scaletts - T.
G. Thomas, Watkins 2, G. Evans, C. Bowen 3,
P. Bowen, HT 16-29, At: 2,281.

Northampton 23 Toulouse 21
Northampton - T. Robinson, P. Grayson 5,
D. Dham, Toulouse 2, HT 10-0, At: 5,765.
Michalak, P. Michalak 3, HT 17-14, At: 12,002.

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Williams, C. Stanton, HT 12-7, At: 5,628.

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**SERIOUSLY
football**

Ronaldo's bawled out

NEW'S RANT WORKS WONDERS



THANK CRIST
Rlo Ferdinand
and Giggs welcome
Ronaldo's goal

GARY NEVILLE'S rollicking for Cristiano Ronaldo had the desired effect.

Neville could claim both a physical and mental 'assist' as Ronaldo ended three months of frustration by finally breaking his goal duck for the season.

He had run 50 yards to bawl his disgust at Ronaldo after he had casually frittered away the easiest of several chances when he tried to lift the ball over Kasey Keller but landed his effort on top of the net.

Neville's blunt message was along the lines of 'stop fannyng around and give it some welly'.

Three minutes later Ronaldo scored with a sweetly-struck volley from 15 yards.

He dared not miss because it was put on a plate for him by none other than his harshest critic.

Neville offered his congratulations but it didn't take rocket science to work out who the England defender was talking about when he analysed a game in which United had 20 attempts on goal.

by TIM GRAY
Man United3
Southampton0

"Our problem this season has been getting that ruthless streak in front of goal," said Neville.

"Even today we had a couple of chances where we just tried to pussyfoot our way into the net instead of smashing it in.

Ruthless

"Don't get me wrong, a 3-0 win is good, but when Manchester United start to hit five or six at home then it makes people sit up and start to think 'hang on a minute'.

"And that is what we could have done if we had just been a bit more ruthless."

Chelsea's goal difference is double United's and Neville's frustration is that Saturday was a missed opportunity to close that gap.

After a seventh successive win in all competitions, he added: "We're on a little bit of a roll now but we have to keep that going because we are in a position where there can be no more mistakes.

"We are still nine points behind Chelsea and four behind Arsenal and you can't give those kind of teams that kind of advantage going into February and March."

"We have to start closing the gap now and I think we have our best chance to do that over the next few weeks.

"They play each other on Sunday and if we win our game at Fulham on Monday we will close the gap on one of them, or both if it ends in a draw, which is a result we're looking for."

Paul Scholes' close range header after 52 minutes - his fourth in three games - got United rolling.

Wayne Rooney added the second, from a pass from man-of-the-match Ryan Giggs before Ronaldo finally made up for his wastefulness three minutes from time.

Sir Alex Ferguson wasn't so hard on his £12.2m winger as Neville but is still demanding more. He said: "Cristiano has promised me he will get 12 goals - let's hope that is the first of them."

TEAMS

MAN UTD: Carroll, Gary Neville, Ferdinand, Silvestre, Heinze, Ronaldo, Kean, Scholes, Giggs, Rooney, Smith (Bellion 52), Subs: Howard, Brown, Miller, Fletcher.
SOUTHAMPTON: Keller, Nilsson, Jakobsson, Lundekvam, Le Saux, Tefer, Delap (Fernandes 85), Anders Svensson, Higginbotham, Beattie (Blackstock 22), Phillips, Subs: Blayney, Dodd, Crouch.
REF: B Knight.

PSG home in on Saha

PARIS ST GERMAIN coach Vahid Halilhodzic wants Manchester United striker Louis Saha on loan in the January transfer window.

Saha has slipped down the strike order at Old Trafford since the arrival of Wayne Rooney and Alan Smith. Halilhodzic has ruled out buy-

ing Saha but is interested in a loan trade for the France international.

Halilhodzic said: "Louis Saha is a good striker and PSG are looking for a striker."

"He is welcome at PSG if he wants to come. The main problem for PSG is we do not have money to buy a player."

BECKS A REAL DOUBT

from PETE JENSON

DAVID BECKHAM could miss Real Madrid's crucial Champions League decider against Roma on Wednesday after another dose of Argy Barmy.

The England captain limped out of the 0-0 draw at Villarreal last night in the 65th minute after being accidentally clattered by Argentine international Juan Pablo Sorin.

Beckham and Michael



EURO SPOT

Owen - starting a match together for only the second time were behind Real Madrid's best chances in a disappointing draw which leaves them 10 points behind Barcelona.

Owen set up a brilliant chance after 20 minutes when he beat his man on the edge of the box and

squared for Ronaldo, but the Brazilian wasted the inch-perfect pass by taking too many touches.

Then Beckham hit the bar with a free-kick on the half-hour after Ronaldo had been flattened on the edge of the box.

But with Beckham finishing the game on the

bench nursing a sore right foot Real were lucky to escape with a draw after ex-Birmingham flop Luciano Figueroa had a goal disallowed for offside.

Meanwhile, Arsenal go into their crunch Champions League tie against Rosenborg at Highbury tomorrow boosted by the news that the Norwegians will be without their star midfielder Jan Gunnar Solli who has a groin strain.

THIS WEEK'S B-I-G GAMES

TODAY (7.45 unless stated) Barclays Premiership Middlesbrough v Man City (8pm).....	Group B Liverpool v Olympiakos..... Bayer Leverkusen v Dynamo Kiev..... Roma v Real Madrid.....	Coca-Cola League Two 27 Bristol Rovers v Macclesfield..... 28 Bury v Southend..... 29 Chester v Shrewsbury..... 30 Darlington v Leyton Orient..... 31 Kidderminster v Rochdale..... 32 Lincoln City v Cheltenham..... 33 Mansfield v Rushden..... 34 Northampton v Boston Utd..... 35 Notts County v Wycombe..... 36 Oxford Utd v Cambridge Utd..... 37 Scunthorpe v Swasea..... 38 Yeovil v Grimsby.....
TOMORROW (7.45 unless stated) UEFA Champions League Group E Arsenal v Rosenborg..... Panathinaikos v PSV.....	Group C Ajax v Bayern Munich..... Maccabi Tel-Aviv v Juventus.....	Bank of Scotland Scottish Premier League 39 Dundee Utd v Kilmarnock..... 40 Dunfermline v Celtic..... 41 Hibernian v Aberdeen..... 42 Inverness CT v Hearts..... 43 Motherwell v Livingston..... 44 Rangers v Dundee.....
Group F Celtic v AC Milan..... Shakhtar Donetsk v Barcelona.....	Group D Fenerbahce v Man Utd..... Lyon v Sparta Prague.....	Bell's Scottish League Division One 45 Airdrie Utd v St Johnstone..... 46 Clyde v Partick..... 47 Hamilton v Raith..... 48 Queen of South v Ross County..... 49 St Mirren v Falkirk.....
Group G Inter Milan v Anderlecht..... Valencia v Werder Bremen.....	Coca-Cola League One Blackpool v Torquay..... Bournemouth v Bradford City..... Brentford v Luton..... Colchester v Barnsley..... Doncaster v Bristol City..... MK Dons v Peterborough..... Oidham v Cheltenham..... Port Vale v Tranmere..... Walsall v Hartlepool..... Wrexham v Stockport.....	Tennent's Scottish Cup Second Round - Albion v Arbroath..... - Alloa v Stenhousemuir..... - Ayr v Edinburgh City..... - Brechin v Stirling..... - Cove Rangers v Morton..... - Dumbarton v Berwick..... - Gretna v Elgin..... - Huntly v East Fife..... - Keith v Montrose..... - Stranraer v Queen's Park.....
Group H FC Porto v Chelsea..... PSG v CSKA Moscow..... Coca-Cola Championship Wolves v Millwall.....	Group H FC Porto v Chelsea..... PSG v CSKA Moscow..... Coca-Cola Championship Wolves v Millwall.....	Nationwide Conference - Crawley v Burton Albion..... - Dagenham v Aldershot..... - Farnborough v Forest Green..... - Gravesend v Barnet..... - Ha Ilax v Canvey Island..... - Leigh RMI v Accrington..... - Northwich v York..... - Scarborough v Hereford..... - Stevenage v Exeter..... - Tamworth v Carlisle..... - Woking v Morecambe.....
Group G Inter Milan v Anderlecht..... Valencia v Werder Bremen.....	Group H FC Porto v Chelsea..... PSG v CSKA Moscow..... Coca-Cola Championship Wolves v Millwall.....	SATURDAY (3pm unless stated) Barclays Premiership 1 Crystal Palace v Blackburn..... - Everton v Liverpool (12.45)..... 2 Man City v Tottenham..... 3 Newcastle v Portsmouth..... 4 Norwich v Bolton..... 5 Southampton v Middlesbrough..... 6 West Brom v Charlton.....
Group F Celtic v AC Milan..... Shakhtar Donetsk v Barcelona.....	Group D Fenerbahce v Man Utd..... Lyon v Sparta Prague.....	Coca-Cola Championship 7 Burnley v Preston..... 8 Cardiff v Sunderland..... 9 Crawley v Plymouth..... - Derby v Nottm Forest (1pm)..... 10 Leicester v Reading..... 11 Millwall v Brighton..... 12 QPR v Ipswich..... - Rotherham v Sheff Utd (5.15)..... 13 Stoke v Coventry..... 14 Watford v Wolves..... 15 Wigan v Gillingham.....
Group G Inter Milan v Anderlecht..... Valencia v Werder Bremen.....	Group H FC Porto v Chelsea..... PSG v CSKA Moscow..... Coca-Cola Championship Wolves v Millwall.....	Coca-Cola League One 16 Blackpool v Bristol City..... 17 Bradford v Walsall..... 18 Colchester v Hull..... 19 Hartlepool v Stockport..... 20 Luton v Port Vale..... 21 MK Dons v Wrexham..... 22 Oldham v Huddersfield..... 23 Peterborough v Chesterfield..... 24 Sheff Wed v Brentford..... 25 Swindon v Doncaster..... 26 Torquay v Barnsley.....
Group G Inter Milan v Anderlecht..... Valencia v Werder Bremen.....	Group H FC Porto v Chelsea..... PSG v CSKA Moscow..... Coca-Cola Championship Wolves v Millwall.....	WEDNESDAY (7.45 unless stated) UEFA Champions League Group A La Coruna v Monaco.....

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ABRAMOVICH: Turf war

ROM'S PITCH BATTLE

THE one thing Roman Abramovich's billions cannot control is the West London weather.

Once again Chelsea are having trouble with their pitch and more rain could turn Saturday's saturated surface into a bog.

For many seasons the pitch has been a problem, with the stands not allowing enough sunlight and wind on to the grass.

Will Chelsea be the first club to go artificial under new guidelines? Or will Roman start rebuilding?

Don't rule out anything with the richest man in football!

SPURS have aspirations to be a big club again and believe the partnership of Martin Jol and Frank Arnesen will see them climb the Premiership. That ambition will be tested in January when Chelsea come knocking with £20m for England striker Jermain Defoe. Just how big are they?

Jeepers keepers

TO win anything you need an outstanding goalkeeper and Chelsea are already indebted to Petr Cech.

He kept them in the game against Newcastle in the first half and Chelsea's six goals conceded from 16 matches is the best start by any club at this stage of the Premiership.

The same can't be said of their main rivals for the Premiership, Manchester United and Arsenal. Both need to buy a goalkeeper when the transfer window opens in January.

DAVID DEIN, the Arsenal vice-chairman and influential figure at the FA, says television is killing the game and wants a stop to the blanket coverage.

The solution is easy for him and others: don't take the money.

Time for Prem big boys to give a damn

A SAD few days for football. Newcastle chairman Freddy Shepherd tells us the big boys couldn't care less about the minnows and the elite are planning a Premiership breakaway.

The rich get richer; the poor go out of business. No change there, then.

Is that what we are really about in the English game? The men with the money wanting more and a monopoly on everything involved with football?

That's the way it looks and on a weekend of dreams in the second round of the FA Cup we just hope there is still some fight left in those who care about life outside the Premiership.

Proud

Shepherd was telling the truth when he said: "The time will come when the Premier League will run the whole show."

"When you have 52,000 at every home game the last thing we're worried about is clubs in the Third Division."

How depressing is that? What Shepherd forgot was there is no Third Division any more, but we know what he meant.

Proud clubs like Notts County, Leyton Orient, Bristol Rovers and Mansfield have nothing left. Or from League One, Hull - with their big following under Peter Taylor - Sheffield Wednesday and Tranmere are just sinking ships among the power boats.

It is a dangerous situation. Take away the Football League and the lifeblood of the game ends in this

country. Communities survive on its football club, the history and what it means to so many people.

Shepherd and others are forgetting that attendances are up in the Football League. People are interested; they do care.

There is also a supply of talent from the lower clubs. Many learn their trade down the leagues, and some clubs house rising stars who have been ousted from the Premiership by the invasion of foreign talent.

I have nothing against the Premiership chairmen getting fatter and richer but I would fight to protect what goes on underneath them.

The smaller clubs still bring a huge amount of enjoyment to millions and how dare a few men say they are not worried about clubs in the lower divisions?

Shepherd should also consider that, if there was ever a breakaway in the Premiership, what gives his club the right to be part of the power belt?

Newcastle call themselves a big club. Why?

Dreams

They are the bridesmaids of the Premiership. All dressed up but no end product.

All they and their fans have is their dreams, the very thing threatened for others by Shepherd's comments and yesterday's news of a Premiership breakaway revolution, led by Chelsea's Roman Abramovich.

Ask all the Football League clubs in last night's FA Cup third-round draw what life would be like without dreams.

It would be a tragedy for the game if they were squashed by the greed of the big boys.

BRIAN BARWICK, the new FA chief executive, wants TV cameras to be used in football as they are in rugby league, union and cricket.

It is a bold move by Barwick and one we should applaud. New man, new ideas and all that.

What worries me is that the men in suits - who hold the real power - will not allow him the authority to see these ideas through.

SOU HAVE TO SPEND!

WHEN Graeme Souness took over at Newcastle he knew he had to somehow get through to January with his dodgy defence.

Now the new transfer window is on top of him he must spend big to sign at least two central defenders who are up to Premiership class.

One thing is certain: Newcastle, who have conceded 31 goals in their 16 matches, will continue to go back with the awful Titus Bramble and Ronny Johnsen, once outstanding but now well past his sell-by date.

SULK IS JUST A SINNER

DON'T you just love Nicolas Anelka, Manchester City's sulking, brooding, under-achieving French striker?

We now have "Anelka in quit threat"... part 10!

This time he tells us he's only playing for Manchester City as punishment for his past sins.

At least it gave me a laugh yesterday morning.

Then he talked again about City not being good enough blah, blah, blah.

No doubt he will deny it all soon.

He will say he was misquoted by the nasty old media, just as he always does.

Criticised

Anelka (pictured) is not being punished by anyone.

Criticised, yes, and rightly so for proving himself in the past as a money-grabber who held Arsenal to ransom, for shifting clubs when things don't go right and for being a huge talent who simply can't raise himself to any consistent level.

Anelka is the classic take-the-money-and-moan player and I'm surprised City boss Kevin Keegan puts up with him.

Just sell him, kick him out and any club signing Anelka should remember it will not be long before he finds something he doesn't like to moan about.

But being punished for past sins?

At least it's a new one by the big whinger!



A YEAR OF SHEER KELL

DOUBLE gold medal-winner Kelly Holmes is the red-hot favourite to win the BBC Sports Personality of the Year award, ahead of Matthew Pinsent and young Olympic boxing hero Amir Khan.

But don't rule out an honour for Danny Williams.

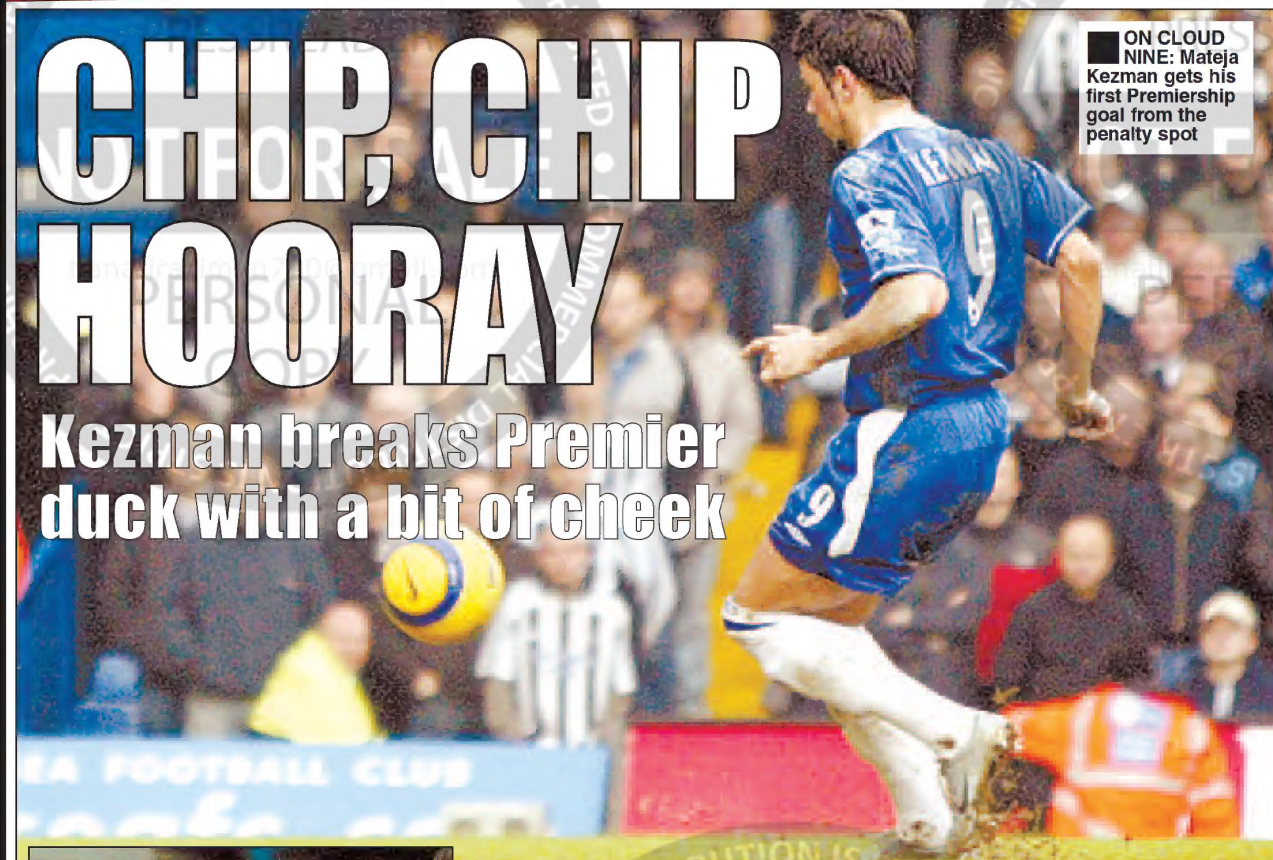
He has come from nowhere to bid for the world heavyweight title on Saturday.

And I will be in Las Vegas to see if fairytales really do come true.

SERIOUSLY football Chelsea's team spirit sees striker off the mark

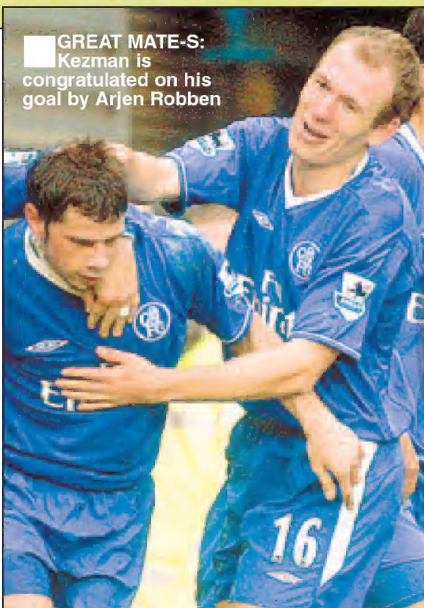
CHIP, CHIP HOORAY

Kezman breaks Premier duck with a bit of cheek



ON CLOUD NINE: Mateja Kezman gets his first Premiership goal from the penalty spot

GREAT MATE-S: Kezman is congratulated on his goal by Arjen Robben



MATEJA KEZMAN had been counting the minutes to his first Premiership goal.

And now the Bosnian striker has ended his drought - with the bravest and cheekiest penalty you could possibly imagine - Arsenal, Manchester United and the rest of Europe beware!

On his lucky-for-some 13th league appearance for Chelsea the 25-year-old, who was compared to the legendary Marco van Basten for his scoring exploits in Holland, topped off the table-topping Blues' win with a stoppage-time penalty.

Insight

The ex-PSV Eindhoven star chipped his kick straight down the middle to send his confidence soaring just in time for Sunday's top-of-the-table showdown at Arsenal.

But perhaps most worrying for Jose Mourinho's rivals here and abroad was how Kezman's goal gave an insight into the fantastic team spirit the Portuguese coach has built at Chelsea.

Knowing how much Kezman wanted, and needed, a goal, Mourinho moved onto the pitch to order he should take the spot-kick. Regular taker Frank Lampard gave him the ball and after

by DAVID WOODS

Chelsea..... 4
Newcastle..... 0

Kezman scored the whole team charged to congratulate him, with half of them piling on top of the gutsy little striker.

At the final whistle, Mourinho ran 20 yards to hug Kezman as the feel-good factor flooded through Stamford Bridge.

"I'd played more than 1,000 minutes this season and had only scored one goal, so it's been very difficult," confessed Kezman, who came on for Tiago in the 61st minute.

"Goals are my life. When you score every year 20 or 30 for the past seven or eight years, and then get just one in three months it's very hard.

"I was born to score goals and without them I'm not a good player. I can do my bit but if I don't score, it's not the real me.

"When we were given the penalty I went to Frank and he gave me the ball because he knows how difficult it's been for me.

"The manager's created a fantastic atmosphere and spirit this season with this team - you can see it,

you can feel it. You can learn a lot from him, not just in football but in many, many things outside football too. He's a very positive mentality - every day, every moment."

Kezman's late goal capped a brilliant half-hour from Chelsea as they nailed Newcastle, with the superb Lampard, impressive Didier Drogba and electric Arjen Robben also scoring.

Unhappy

Newcastle held their own for almost an hour and keeper Petr Cech had to be at his best to keep out two Laurent Robert free-kicks and win a one-on-one with Craig Bellamy.

But Magpies boss Graeme Souness was unhappy about Lampard's goal, moaning: "You cannot allow someone that amount of time.

"As for the second goal, Titus Bramble is meant to be the strongest man in English football and he got pushed off the ball."

TEAMS

CHELSEA: Cech, Paulo Ferreira, Ricardo Carvalho, Terry, Gallas (Bridge 61), Tiago (Kezman 61), Makelele, Lampard, Robben, Gudjohnsen (Drogba 45), Duff. Subs: Parker, Pidgeley.
NEWCASTLE: Given, Taylor, Bramble, Johnsen, Hughes, Dyer, Jenas, Bowyer, Robert (Ameobi 77), Kluyvert, Bellamy. Subs: Elliott, Harper, Milner, Ambrose.
REF: R Styles.

Gull Dan is flying

■ Brighton 1 Rotherham 0

BRIGHTON'S Dan Harding marked a change of role to wing-back with a vital late winner.

But he refused to shed any light on his immediate future following the club's first home win in six weeks.

Rangers and Everton are leading the hunt for the England Under-21 left-back, who is stalling on a two-year deal extension.

Harding - out of contract at the end of the season - said: "I've spoken to the gaffer and the chairman and that's how things have been left at the moment."

Boss Mark McGhee concedes the cash-strapped Seagulls face a struggle to hold on to their young star as they continue their battle to avoid relegation from the Championship.

Joy for Jerome

■ by KEN GORMAN Cardiff 3 Gillingham 1

MILLWALL striker Neil Harris could find his hopes of a fresh start at Cardiff frozen out - by an 18-year-old whizzkid.

Harris joined the Welsh side on a month's loan last week to answer their crisis call.

But he started this relegation dogfight on the bench as boss Lennie Lawrence gave teenager Cameron Jerome his full debut.

Jerome gave Cardiff a 14th-minute lead before Peter Thorne struck twice after veteran Tommy Johnson had equalised.

Thorne said: "The fact that Neil is on the bench is enough to put pressure on us to play well enough to stay in the side. And Cameron rose to the challenge. He was superb."

Gift-ed winner

■ Watford 0 Stoke 1

ADE AKINBIYI insists Stoke were ready to pounce on Watford's Carling Cup hangover.

The Hornets may have sent Portsmouth packing but the Potters knew they could be there for the taking.

Former Vicarage Road favourite Gifton Noel-Williams netted the first-half winner as Tony Pulis' men claimed their first win in five.

Hitman Akinbiyi said: "We knew they may be suffering a hangover, so the gaffer told us to get at them early. It worked a treat."

Watford stopper Sean Dyche said: "The Liverpool semi-final is a long way off.

"We need to concentrate on the nitty gritty of the league."

Boro left in a Wright pickle

■ by IAN MURTAGH

MIDDLESBROUGH are facing a left-back crisis - and it has arrived at the worst possible time, with Shaun Wright-Phillips at the Riverside tonight.

Franny Queudrue's sixth red card in English football at Spurs last week has earned him a three-match ban, leaving

TONIGHT'S TV CLASH

injury-plagued Boro without a recognised replacement to square up to the hottest right-winger in the Premiership.

Stuart Parnaby is a long-term absentee, Colin Cooper rarely plays on the left flank these days, teenager

Tony McMahon is right-footed, while Michael Reiziger is still not 100 per cent fit.

Crucial

It leaves Bolo Zenden, whose goals from midfield have been so crucial in recent weeks, as the favourite to step

in, although Gareth Southgate admits no one is volunteering!

"It's not an ideal situation when you're up against a player like Wright-Phillips," he admitted.

"We don't have a natural left-footed replacement, so it'll have to be someone playing out of position."

"I suppose whoever does get the job would

pick someone else to do it!"

Boro have also been warned by City boss Kevin Keegan that Robbie Fowler's 'get fit quick' training programme has turned the clock back for him.

Keegan said: "I think we have seen little glimpses of Robbie being right back to his best. He is still the best finisher I've ever seen."



EMERGENCY: Bolo Zenden

Perryman pulls two crackers

From Back Page
the roof. I suppose you can't with the whole country watching you but we did! It was absolutely fantastic."

The Grecians entered a company voluntary arrangement with their creditors last season, which reduced their debts from around £4.5m to £750,000.

Their impending trip to Old Trafford will all but solve their financial woes.

Reward

"It's Christmas come early. It's good reward for a club that's really striving to get better," Perryman added.

"Of course, we're not out of the woods yet but we are trying on the training field, in the games, behind the scenes, with the fundraising and things like that.

"This is just great reward for all those people. It's unbelievable.

"I had about 20 people in my front room and we all hit the roof. It was absolutely fantastic."

Exeter booked their place in the third round with a rousing 2-0 defeat of League Two side Doncaster courtesy of goals from Steve Flack and a 45-yard wonder strike from United nut Dean Moxey.

But normal service will resume for Exeter today as

they prepare for a Nationwide Conference clash with Dagenham tomorrow night. Regaining their place in the Football League remains the priority at St James' Park.

Perryman said: "We have to win some league games. "We want to get up that table and into the play-off positions. If we take our eye off the ball now... that's not going to happen, is it?"

"But let's have our day, let's celebrate this and then, Monday morning, off we go again. Back to reality."

Tiny Yeadling, formed in 1960 as Yeadling Youth Club, are discussing if they can stage the match or whether they will have to switch it on police and local authority advice.

Switch

The Warren holds around 3,500 and was used to film scenes for films Bend It Like Beckham and Mean Machine, with Vinnie Jones.

Manager Hippolyte immediately called for the game to be switched to Newcastle but that may not be permitted under competition rules.

He said: "I'm very happy with the draw but I am just a bit concerned about what the FA are going to do.

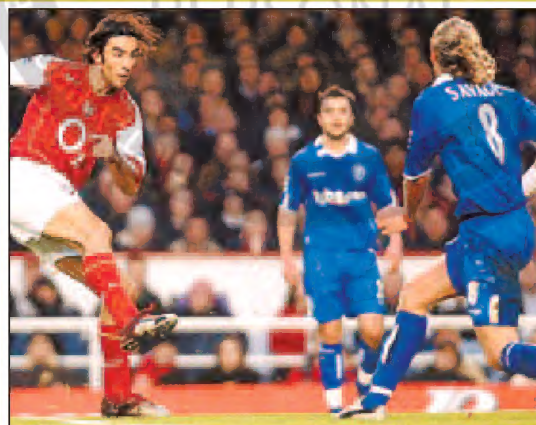
"We want to switch it because we can't play it here. Let's get it on there."

SERIOUSLY football

Fabregas is ready to fill Vieira's

I'M NEVER

TAKING THE MAIK: Thierry Henry gets the better of Blues keeper Taylor to hit Arsenal's second goal



BOBBY DAZZLER: Robert Pires blasts home the first



HOT HEAD: Henry nods in Arsenal's third

FA CUP Third round draw

Arsenal v Stoke, Swindon/Notts County v Middlesbrough, Manchester United v Exeter, Plymouth v Everton, Leicester v Blackpool, Derby v Wigan, Sunderland v Crystal Palace, Wolves v Millwall, Yeading v Newcastle, Hull v Colchester, Tottenham v Brighton, Reading v Stockport/Swansea, "Birmingham v Leeds, Hartlepool v Boston, MK Dons v Peterborough, Oldham v Manchester City, Chelsea v Scunthorpe, Cardiff v Blackburn, Charlton v Rochdale, West Ham v Norwich, Sheffield United v Aston Villa, Preston v West Brom, Rotherham v Yeovil, Burnley v Liverpool, Bournemouth v Chester, Coventry v Crewe, Watford v Fulham, Ipswich v Bolton, Portsmouth v Gillingham, Northampton v Southampton, QPR v Nottingham, Luton Town v Hinkley/Brentford.

Ties to be played January 8-9

Ruud's injury worry

From Back Page
been doing really well. There is plenty of experience there - you wouldn't hesitate to play the back four of Phil Neville, Wes Brown, John O'Shea and Quinton Fortune any time, in either a Premiership or Champions League game.

Stitches

"I will also take Darren Fletcher, Liam Miller, David Bellion and Eric Djemba-Djemba with us as well as Ryan Giggs and Cristiano Ronaldo. We're going out there to win."

With Louis Saha on the

sidelines, Ferguson may not risk Alan Smith who needed stitches in a head wound on Saturday.

Victory would clinch the group and ensure a last 16 tie with the runners-up from another group.

But with Real Madrid and Barcelona likely to finish second in their sections, Ferguson admits he doesn't know whether finishing first will prove to be an advantage.

boots as Arsenal know it's make-or-break time



GUNNER LET YOU DOWN

Henry laughs at his snipers

From Back Page

It makes me laugh. I don't watch Match Of The Day. When you don't do it for one or two games out of 300, people give you stick but that's the way it is.

"What is strange is that some of those people played football. It doesn't make any sense.

"The most important thing is that my team-mates are happy when I go back into the dressing-room, that they know I tried to give 100 per cent, that I can look at myself in the mirror, that I can look at my team-mates and my fans.

"I don't understand the way the critics work. When people question the desire or commitment of someone like Raul, for instance, I'm amazed as he's been scoring goals since he was 17 and he's still doing it.

"If he has a bad moment, like the rest of the squad, they give him stick. I find that amusing. But that's the game, that's what keeps you awake."

Henry takes over the captaincy with Patrick Vieira suspended.

And Henry said: "I will be honoured to be captain for the match but the big thing is to try to do it for my team. If you have the armband and you don't do anything then it doesn't mean much.

Poor

"But as long as I can walk, I can try to run. People gave me stick during the week but that's the way it is.

"People were speculating about us as we'd had a poor run, but people should look at how many games I play in a season and how many of them are bad.

"You can't perform all the time and be one of the best on the pitch. This time it was about commitment and the experienced players showed us the way.

"Everyone gave us some stick after the Liverpool game and the first-half was really poor, but everyone forgot that we had to fight with nine men against PSV.

"That takes a lot out of your body. But when you play for Arsenal, everyone expects you to win.

"I've scored 16 this season but it's not enough. I've always been like that. Whether I'd played well or scored, my dad always used to say: 'It's not enough'. I don't mind that.

"But it's not just about me, it's a team game. I can lead by example but the second goal I scored against Birmingham anyone could have scored that.

"I'm sure that if I'd missed people would have said: 'You can see he's not fresh'. That's the way it is."

"I'm sure I will be criticised even if I play well against Rosenborg and we lose. But what can you do? "I would never change places with anyone."

by **SCOTT COLEMAN**

**Arsenal..... 3
Birmingham..... 0**

TEEN ace Cesc Fabregas insists he can handle the pressure as he prepares for a key role in the biggest week of Arsenal's season.

The 17-year-old will assume massive responsibility in the Gunners midfield for tomorrow's win-or-bust Champions League showdown against Rosenborg.

He will fill the role of senior midfielder with skipper Patrick Vieira suspended and Edu and Gilberto Silva injured.

And Fabregas will be handed a similar task in Sunday's Highbury showdown against Premiership leaders Chelsea.

But the Spanish kid the Gunners nicked from Barcelona insists he will take it all in his stride.

Fabregas said: "With Patrick missing I will have a lot more responsibility against Rosenborg but I am not afraid of that.

Pressure

"I will give it my best shot, just as I have been doing in every game during the past few months. I just love playing football and I always want to play - even when the pressure is at its highest.

"I have a lot of responsibility now and am getting accustomed to dealing with pressure in every game.

"I'm expecting that to continue and I hope that I will be able to help other young Arsenal players to cope with it when they join the team, just as the senior players have helped me.

"I think I have developed and grown a lot as a player this season because of my involvement in the first team.

"Arsene Wenger gave me the opportunity to show what I can do and I have profited from it.

"I'm growing up playing in the best team, in the best football league in the world and this has been very important for me and for my football development."

Debt

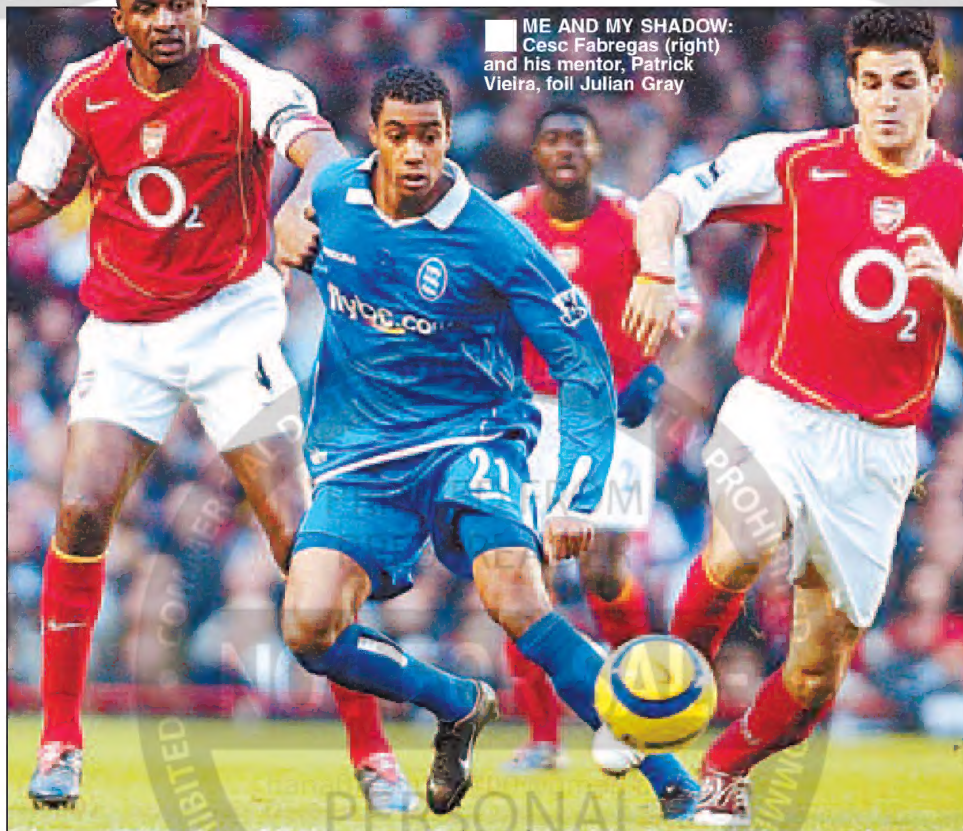
Fabregas has impressed since he was handed his chance by Arsene Wenger in the Community Shield against Manchester United at the start of the season.

He has flourished alongside Vieira but admits: "I have so much to thank Patrick for:

"He has looked after me on and off the pitch and helped me to grow as a person, and also as a player.

"I think when I look back on my career in a few years I will owe a great debt to Patrick."

Fabregas played in Sat-



ME AND MY SHADOW:
Cesc Fabregas (right)
and his mentor, Patrick
Vieira, foil Julian Gray

DEADLY DECEMBER

ARSENAL face a daunting month which could make or break their season. Their fixture line-up reads:

Dec 7	Rosenborg	H	Champions League
Dec 12	Chelsea	H	Premiership
Dec 19	Portsmouth	A	Premiership
Dec 26	Fulham	H	Premiership
Dec 29	Newcastle	A	Premiership

urday's 3-0 win over Birmingham which saw Wenger's decision to axe keeper Jens Lehmann vindicated by the club's first clean sheet in 14 games and ended a run of just nine points in the last seven league matches.

It wasn't the most convincing performance from either Arsenal or Spanish keeper Manuel Almunia, who almost fumbled a Clinton Morrison shot

across the line. But Wenger believes the result proves he was right to make changes - and Lehmann could now face a lengthy spell on the sidelines.

Wenger said: "Listen, Jens Lehmann played 49 league games unbeaten and is a fantastic goalkeeper.

"Nobody would deny that. But you can only be honest to what you feel has to be done with the team and that's what I did.

Elsewhere, we have had not much choice because of injuries and sometimes it's not the individual performances of the player that makes you make those kind of decisions.

"I made that decision honestly and without trying to blame Jens for this or that.

Different

"He hasn't played that badly at all. But I feel that Almunia has shown great performances in training and he could also have felt it wasn't fair to him that he wasn't playing.

"I can understand that 40 million people could have a different point of view but at the end of the day, I have to make the decisions."

Former Arsenal star and goalkeeper coach Bob Wilson described Wenger's

decision to drop Lehmann as "brave" and believes he will stick with Almunia against Rosenborg.

Wilson said: "If it goes wrong, obviously it will reflect on Arsene but I think they will beat Rosenborg and that will give them a lift."

Robert Pires got Arsenal back on the winning trail with a first-half strike against Birmingham.

And two goals from Thierry Henry put them in the right frame of mind to face the Norwegian side.

TEAMS

ARSENAL: Almunia, Lauren, Toure, Campbell, Cole, Ljungberg, Vieira, Fabregas (Ramirez 72), Pires, Reyes (Clicly 57), Henry, Subs: Lehmann, Senderos, Owusu-Aboyele.
BIRMINGHAM: Taylor, Melchiot (Martin Taylor 81), Cunningham, Upson, Elphinstone, Savage, Anderton (Grankjaer 57), Gray, Dunn (Morrison 57), Heskey, Subs: Bennett, Yorke, REF: D Gallagher.

Bruce battle

BIRMINGHAM boss Steve Bruce was left to consider his options after his side managed only one shot on goal at Highbury and showed zero ambition.

"I may have to change things and bring in players who are not as technical but are better suited to the position we're in," he said.

"There are a couple of irons in the fire, but we'll see.

"I still think we are stronger as a squad than last year. And I'm bab confident we can get to the 48-50 point margin this season."

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